



VISUOMENĖS, POLITIKOS IR LITERATŪROS DIENRAŠTIS

Kaunas, ketvirtadienis, rugpjūčio 3 d. 1922 m.

LAISVĖS ŽINIOS

Lietuvos Konstitucija priimta.

Stojamieji mokytojų - rugpjūtis

LAISVĖ | DAILY NEWSPAPER ON THE SOCIETY, POLITICS AND LITERATURE | Kaunas, Thursday, 3 August 1922

The Constitution of Lithuania has been adopted

On 1 August at around 4 p.m. (16:00), the Constituent Seimas adopted the Constitution of Lithuania in its third reading. For this reason, bells were rung in the Basilica and other churches, the Freedom Bell rang. The Artillery fired salutes, the town was decorated with national flags, and shops were closed. Today, on 2 August, a solemn thanksgiving mass was held by H. E. Bishop J. Skvireckas in the Basilica Church, which was attended by the President of the State, members of the Constituent Seimas, and Government representatives.



Collector coin

dedicated to the centenary of the Constitution of the State of Lithuania



€50 coin

Denomination: €50
Composition: gold Au 999
Diameter: 22.30 mm
Weight: 778 g

Quality: proof
Designed by Egidijus Rapolis
Edge of the coin: plain
Release date: 6 September 2022

Mintage: 3,000 pcs
Minted at the Lithuanian Mint





The 1922 Constitution of the State of Lithuania

The interwar period for the young state of Lithuania that declared its independence on 16 February 1918 was a time of trials and upheavals. And particularly eventful was the year 1922, when Lithuania adopted its Law on Land Reform, opened the University of Lithuania and introduced its first national currency, the litas. The adoption of the Constitution of Lithuania, which became a viable marker of the country's statehood, was also among its historic achievements.

The creation of constitutional acts in the interwar period was a challenging process, since as many as six versions of the Constitution were adopted during that period. And yet, like the obverse and reverse of a Lithuanian litas coin, each Constitution represented a different level of maturity and varying success. The first fundamental laws of the Provisional Constitution of the State of Lithuania, adopted by the Council of State on 2 November 1918, were modest in form and content - they consisted of a Preamble and six chapters (29 articles in total), yet they offered hope for sustaining the process of building the state. However, the threats to the state's existence and the need to reconcile the mechanism of power quickly led to a new order for changes in the constitutional letter. On 4 April 1919, the Lithuanian Council of the State adopted the Fundamental Laws of the Provisional Constitution of the State of Lithuania, consisting of a Preamble and eight chapters, and retaining almost two-

thirds of the provisions of the previous version. Perhaps the most important change in the revised version of the constitutional act was the establishment of the president as a one-person state authority. It is debatable whether the 1918 and 1919 Fundamental Laws were different to any significant extent; rather they were only two versions of the same Provisional Constitution of the State of Lithuania.

The Constituent Seimas (the Parliament), which commenced its activities on 15 May 1920, could hardly operate within the confines of the Fundamental Laws of 1919, which led to violation of a considerable number of the Fundamental Laws' provisions and therefore, without much hesitation, the Seimas adopted the last Provisional Constitution on 2 June 1920. This document was not dissimilar in content and form to the previous constitutional acts, consisted of seven chapters and a total of 18 articles. That version of the Constitution completed the cycle of provisional constitutions of varying quality offering the country a fragile constitutional framework.

Even before the Constituent Seimas met, public discussions had begun regarding a permanent constitution that would establish a democratic parliamentary republic with broad parliamentary powers. The actual work of drafting the Constitution began with the establishment, by the will of the Constituent Seimas, of the Constitutional Commission which worked on this great endeavour for more than a year and a half. In February 1922, the Constitutional Commission submitted a draft Constitution to the Presidium of the Constituent Seimas (at the same time the Commission itself continued working though taking into account the suggestions and comments received). Following lengthy debates (and not without some harsh rhetoric), the Constituent Seimas decided to adopt the new

Constitution on 1 August 1922 (with 59 votes in favour and the People's Farmers and Social Democrats abstaining). It was published in the government gazette Vyriausybės Žinios on 6 August 1922. Not many of the 2 million citizens knew the provisions of the new piece of legislation, but it still became the basic law of the land for at least the next six years.

The new Constitution consisted of a Preamble and 108 articles, divided into 15 chapters. Its first paragraph clearly stated that "the State of Lithuania is an independent democratic Republic. The sovereign power of the State belongs to the People". It clearly defined the governance framework of state power (the Seimas, the Government, and the Court), stating that "no law contrary to the Constitution shall be valid in the State of Lithuania". The section enumerating citizens' rights is presented in a very respectful way (right after the General Laws), bypassing the implications of other provisions of various governance constructs, and listing all possible freedoms of citizens.

It was only after the latter were catalogued that the Constitution adopted by the Constituent Seimas made room for the Seimas and the Government (the balance of power between them would be debated only after the adoption of the Constitution).

The Seimas was elected for three years with the task of making laws and overseeing the operation of the Government; the Government consisted of the President of the Republic and the Cabinet of Ministers. The President of the Republic (at least 35 years of age and a Lithuanian citizen) was to be elected by the Seimas for a three-year term of office. The institution of the Court (one of the three structural elements of government) is described in a modest way, but it is recorded that "the organisation, competence and jurisdiction of the courts shall be determined by law".

The Constitution moderately discussed the possibilities of local self-government, did not forget to name the rights of national minorities ("national minorities of citizens, which constitute a significant part of the citizenry, shall have the right to autonomously manage the affairs of their own national culture within the limits of the law"), obliged all Lithuanian citizens to participate in the "defence of its territory in accordance with the procedure specified by law", fixed the possibilities and priorities of the education of the younger generation ("elementary schooling shall be compulsory"), and it was also elaborate and precise in describing the priorities of faith, the religious and denomination matters. Chapters XI and XII of the Constitution outlined aspects of economic policy and the management of public finances, while Chapter XIII outlined the main principles of social security.

When bringing the piece of legislation into the world, the legislators acted somewhat cautiously by introducing safeguards for amending and supplementing the Constitution; thus having perfected it, the Seimas wanted to protect it, too.

Looking at the 1922 Constitution of the State of Lithuania a century later, it should be recognised as having completed the work of restoring the independent state and it rightly deserved the laurels as the most prominent fundamental piece of legislation of interwar Lithuania.

Dr. Saulius Kaubrys



Meeting of the Constituent Seimas at the Seimas Palace, Kaunas, 1921. Photographer not specified. The Wroblewski Library of the Lithuanian Academy of Sciences, RSS, Fg 1-607/2

Excerpt from the Constitution of the State of Lithuania adopted on 1 August 1922 by the Constituent Seimas. Photo dated 6 August 1922. Lithuanian Central State Archives

